

Note for Secretary General re. role and processes of TLAC in filling of Secretary General Posts

Role of TLAC

- The role of TLAC is to support the Government objective that the recruitment and selection process for the most senior Civil Service positions is accessible to the widest pool of qualified candidates from all sectors.
- TLAC identifies the best candidate(s) for each position and makes recommendations to the relevant Minister or Government as appropriate.
- TLAC operates under the Code of Practice of the Commission for Appointments in accordance with the principles of merit, consistency, accountability, probity, best practice and professional confidentiality.
- TLAC operates in an independent manner and strictly on the basis of open competition and merit. TLAC is responsible for determining its own procedures and remit, subject to Government decisions as appropriate.
- **Subject to certain exceptions, TLAC deals with all posts at and above Assistant Secretary level or equivalent in the Civil Service.**
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Membership of TLAC

In line with the Programme for Government commitment, the restructuring of the Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) was announced in April 2011. The Government decided that the new membership of TLAC should comprise:

- (i) Secretary General, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform;
- (ii) Secretary General to the Government;
- (iii) two other senior public servants appointed for three year terms and;
- (iv) five members from outside the civil service appointed for three year terms, one of whom would be the chairperson.

In July 2015 the Government agreed to expand the membership of the Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) from five external members (including Chairperson) to seven external members and from four internal members to six internal members.

The current external members of TLAC are:

1. Dr Dorothy Butler Scally, Professional Development Consultant and Chair of TLAC.
2. Mr Kevin Empey, Director, Towers Watson
3. Ms Jane Williams, Managing Partner, Sia Partners
4. Mr Tony Keohane (Former CEO & Chairman, Tesco Ltd)
5. Ms Brid Horan (Non-Executive Director)
6. Mr Charles (Charlie) Dolan (Director, Consulting Ltd)
7. Vacancy following the expiration of the term of Mr Clive Brownlee (Praesta Ireland)

The current Civil Service members of TLAC are:

1. Mr Robert Watt, Secretary General, Department for Public Expenditure & Reform
2. Mr Martin Fraser, Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach
3. Mr John Murphy, Secretary General, Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation
4. Ms Niamh O'Donoghue, Secretary General, Department of Social Protection

5. Mr Jim Breslin, Secretary General, Department of Health
6. Mr Maurice Quinn, Secretary General, Department of Defence

Recruitment Process

Job Specification: Job specifications and **person specifications** setting out the requirements for the post are the responsibility of the hiring Department and DPER, with observations provided by TLAC members. **At commencement of the recruitment campaign, these are provided to the Public Appointments Service (PAS) which manages the advertisement and preliminary recruitment process for TLAC.** In advance of advertising the job, PAS engages with the Secretary General of the parent Department in an effort to ascertain the key skills required for the role and to identify the current and critical issues within the organisation that would be of particular interest to potential candidates. **These are summarised in a job specification that reflects the seniority and responsibility of the post and that it is open to applicants from all sectors.**

Application: The application for TLAC posts includes: a comprehensive CV detailing posts held, salary, line reports, etc.; a statement of the applicants' track record of achievement and delivery, and how they meet the requirements of the post; a statement of how an applicant will meet the standard of the competencies for the post under consideration.

Advertising: **The advertising of all posts is organised by the PAS. The job is generally advertised by placing notices in selected national newspapers, issuing job alerts by email and text message to those who have registered their interest in positions at this level on the PAS website, and directly notifying appropriate grades across Civil Service Departments as well as other Public Service Bodies and Associations.**

Executive Search for Candidates: In order to ensure the widest senior level candidate pool is available for consideration, PAS in conjunction with TLAC, may arrange the support of retained Executive Search for all Secretary General Positions, and by exception for specific Assistant Secretary General posts.

Short-listing

- The short listing process is carried out by a selection Board convened by PAS under an independent chair; it also includes a retired Secretary General, an independent person who is a subject matter expert for the post in hand, and a TLAC representative. This process is supported by a PAS representative who oversees the process and records the deliberations of the Board. The Secretary General of the hiring Department is in attendance in an observer role to provide a briefing and clarity on the specific post and the Department.
- The Board agrees proposed short listing criteria consistent with the scale, skills, track record and experience required for the post. These criteria are used to assess the candidates in a consistent manner based on the information contained in the application forms, CVs and covering letter/personal statement.
- Based on the information provided by the candidate the Board assesses candidates' suitability and provides a short comment to support the assessment. The Board then compiles a report of the shortlisted candidates going forward to the preliminary interview stage of the process. All candidates are notified accordingly.

Preliminary Interviews

- Preliminary interviews are usually conducted by the same selection Board that undertook the short listing process **with the exception of the hiring Secretary General**. A TLAC member participates for Secretary General Posts and **by exception** for specified Assistant Secretary General posts.
- **The PAS prepares an interview guide for the role which is referenced by the selection board in conducting the preliminary interviews. A PAS representative is also in attendance for the purpose of ensuring that the interviews are conducted in a fair and consistent manner in accordance with PAS recruitment license and the Commission for Public Service Appointments code. The PAS representative also provides assistance and guidance to the Board and takes the official record of the process.**
- The interview will explore each candidate's CV, track record, competencies and probity in regard to the post under consideration. Based on the interview and documentation, the Preliminary Interview Board identifies those candidates who in the Board's judgement are suitable for appointment to the post under consideration, generally to a maximum of 5 candidates.

Information flow from Preliminary Interview to TLAC: **For each candidate being sent forward for final interview, the Preliminary Interview Board are asked to summarise the reason the candidate is being sent forward as suitable for appointment to the post, areas of strengths or challenges, and if there are areas in which the Board feel the candidate should be subject to further probing.**

Candidates are also required to undertake psychometric testing, the results of which are shared with each candidate on request and the TLAC panel. **At times** Chairpersons of Preliminary Interview Boards may be asked to brief TLAC prior to final interviews.

TLAC Interviews: All TLAC interviews are conducted by sub-panels of the Top Level Appointments Committee each comprising two Secretaries General, two external members and chaired by the TLAC Chairperson. The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform gave an undertaking to ensure that there is adequate rotation among the members in the composition of boards.

Secretary General Role

- **The retired or retiring Secretary General does not attend at their successors' interview; he/she briefs the TLAC panel in advance of the interviews and attends the conclusion of TLAC deliberations.**
- **For Assistant Secretary General posts, the Secretary General of the Department for where the post exists will have the option to participate in the TLAC interview and the later deliberations.**
- **In the case of specialist posts, the TLAC may make special arrangements in conjunction with the PAS, by delegating the final interview to a specialist Board with TLAC participation or by adding a member from outside of TLAC to a final TLAC panel.**

Format of Interviews

- The TLAC task is to judge who best out of the number of appointable candidates before them should be recommended to the Minister/Government for a particular top level post.
- **For each interview panel the candidate will be met by the Chair and introduced to members. The interview begins with the candidate's presentation. In advance of the interview candidates are provided with a relevant topic/question and allowed 8-10 minutes to present on the topic. Questions and exploration with each candidate relate to criteria and competencies for this particular post; how the existing and emerging challenges for the Department in question can be addressed and key priorities delivered, as well as the**

candidate's approach to issues such as strategic leadership, change and performance management.

- Each panel determines the nature of the questioning and whether 3, 4 or all 5 panel members should participate in questioning candidates.

Number of candidates recommended

TLAC will recommend one candidate for appointment to the relevant Minister in the case of posts below Secretary General Level; for Secretary General Posts TLAC will recommend up to three names, in alphabetical order to the Government, of those candidates considered to be of the standard required for the post.

Notification of Candidates and Feedback

- All candidates are contacted by either a Secretary General member of TLAC or the TLAC Secretary with news of the outcome of their interview.
- TLAC also encourages unsuccessful candidates to seek verbal feedback from the Secretary General of the Department or the TLAC Chairperson. Such feedback can be helpful to candidates in understanding issues that arose or suggested improvement, and also highlight the person's potential for future TLAC level competitions.

Support & Development of the Senior Public Service

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform with the Senior Public Service carries out programmes of development for existing and newly appointed civil servants. These include: formal induction, coaching / mentoring support, management development, succession planning, etc. Such programmes and supports are of great benefit to new and serving senior Civil Servants in carrying out the standard of achievement needed in their roles.